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**SPECIAL
REPORT
VENEZUELA**

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A girdle, a hidden vest, \$270,000

Downfall of 'The Man with the Dog'

by MIGUEL ACOCA

In ever-increasing numbers foreign Communist agents have slipped into Venezuela to help foment revolution. Here is the story of two of them.

It was steaming hot that night at Maiquetia Airport in Caracas. Streams of tourists jammed the single customs line, irritable as usual. No one noticed two Venezuelans—a rather pretty woman, a mature man—standing in a small quarantine

booth. They intended not to be noticed. They were agents of Digepol, the secret police which combats Venezuela's hard-line Communist terror arm, and the penalty for drawing attention can be an assassin's bullet.

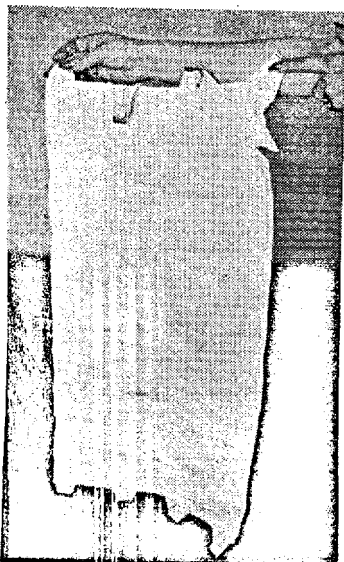
The two—call them Dora and Felix—were awaiting a Viasa Airline jet from Rome. On it were two top Communist couriers. They probably were carrying money. The plane was late that night. The two waited while the tourists grumbled and cursed.

It was no secret to Digepol that Latin American Communists, meet-

ing at Havana last winter, had decided with Soviet backing to step up guerrilla warfare in Venezuela. The 1,500 active guerrillas of the Venezuela party's terror arm, called the FALN, support themselves with gang-style bank robberies and hold-ups. But in the last year Digepol agents have vastly curtailed these crimes, leaving the FALN short of funds. At the Havana meeting the Italian Communist party was chosen to set up a pipeline to move hard cash into Venezuela and the FALN coffers.

The tip had come from a Western

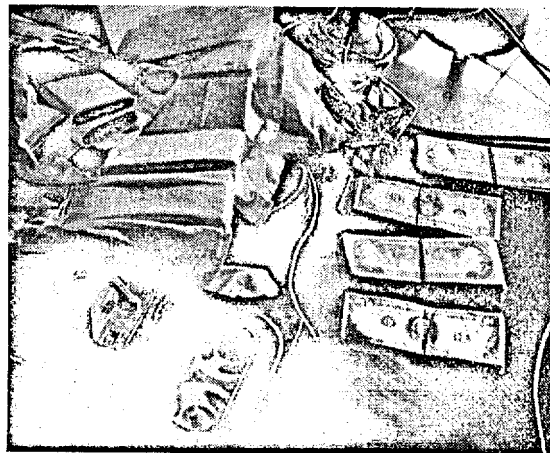
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This girdle encircled \$120,000 as well as Miss Ventosa when it arrived in Venezuela.



A Digepol agent models the vest he hid a fortune under his coat.



Stacks of \$100 bills—100 to a bundle—lie beside the still-loaded vest on a police desk.

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In a Digepol jail in Caracas, Dr. Beltramini and his Pepita seize a moment together.

intelligence agency—the CIA, perhaps—and Felix and Dora watched carefully as the jet from Rome came in. The two they awaited came down the gangway together. Josefa Ventosa Jiménez, 22, of Spain, was, despite a curious thickening of body, a handsome enough traveling companion for Dr. Alessandro Beltramini, 53, a physician from Milan and a well-known Communist. An impulsive and dashing man, he is an old hand at intrigue. During World War II he was smuggled through Nazi lines into Salerno by the OSS to help the Allies.

man with the dog," for on even the most dangerous missions he was accompanied by his big black dog Filippo. The passports of Beltramini and Miss Ventosa showed a previous entry: they had come to Caracas together last July. Their tickets showed they intended to leave in a week and return to Milan via Jamaica, Nassau and London. Now Dora took Miss Ventosa quietly by the arm and led her into a private office.

He turned his back on Miss Ventosa. "No," he said easily, "just somebody I met on the plane."

He was passed through quarantine, immigration and customs. Then he stood in the sultry heat waiting for his luggage to be processed. This is an interminable delay which normally infuriates tourists visiting Caracas. Beltramini showed no irritation. He seemed poised, even relaxed. Felix watched him carefully. Beltramini knew how that he was in trouble but he did not know how much. Would

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he break and run? Would a confederate approach him? Felix waited. But when his luggage was returned, Beltramini got into a taxi and calmly directed it to the luxurious Tamanaco Hotel. Swiftly Felix stepped out, blocked the taxi and arrested him.

In the office, Dora had ordered Miss Ventosa to strip, and then her curious bulkiness was explained. She was wearing a white muslin girdle with neat pockets all around. These contained 1,200 crisp new \$100 bills.

"What's the money for?" Dora asked.

"To buy horses," Miss Ventosa replied airily.

Beltramini was taken into another office. Under his suit Felix found a muslin vest which contained \$150,000 in U.S. currency. The vest was new. Miss Ventosa's girdle looked much used, for it was washed thin and its elastic was frayed.

Suddenly Beltramini regained his interest in Miss Ventosa. She was none other than his own little *Pepita*, the love of his life. He said he planned to divorce his wife, marry Miss Ventosa, purchase a medical clinic in Caracas with all that money and settle down to live happily ever afterward. Miss Ventosa wept.

"Who knows," he added, "I might even buy a few race horses."

In a Caracas jail, both Beltramini and his *Pepita* were superbly confident. Speaking French, Beltramini told me, "I am a Communist—and I'm proud of it. I made war against the Nazis and Fascists, but though I believe in Communism with heart and soul, I'm not involved in the fight anymore." He laughed at the idea that he might be carrying funds to the terroristic FALN. "Why me?" he asked. "I'm a known Communist. The party is cleverer than that. It has other means—there are businessmen who believe as I do."

But his remarks are belied by the fact that he seems completely unconcerned at the loss of \$270,000 in cash—a fortune for any individual.

His arrest was a severe blow to the FALN. The plot demonstrated the extent of the Communist desire to subvert Venezuela. But Digepol probably will have to release and deport Beltramini. It is not a crime to bring money into a country—though Beltramini may have to answer to Italian authorities for smuggling it out. There is one final irony—the Venezuelans intend to place that \$270,000 in a fund for the widows of police and Digepol agents killed by the FALN.



Beltramini rides through Caracas on rare occasion when Digepol let him be seen. Case was kept hidden while police sought possible accomplices.